

**Amendments to the Claims:**

The listing of claims below will replace all prior versions and listings of claims in the application:

**Listing of Claims:**

Claims 1-6 (canceled).

7. (original) A method of ascertaining the integrity of the contents of a container which confines at least one discrete commodity comprising the steps of:

associating the at least one commodity with at least one identifying indicium;  
confining the thus identified at least one commodity in the container;  
monitoring the at least one indicium to gather information denoting the thus detected identifying indicium;  
encoding the thus gathered information; and  
applying the encoded information to the container.

8. (original) The method of claim 7, wherein said monitoring step is carried out subsequent to said confining step and said at least one identifying indicium is detectable through the container.

9. (original) The method of claim 7, wherein the contents of the container consist of an array of smokers' products, said associating step including providing at least some smokers' products of the array with portions of a composite encoded information.

10. (original) The method of claim 7, wherein said associating step includes providing the commodity with a pattern of randomly distributed portions of a composite identifying indicium.

11. (original) The method of claim 10, wherein said monitoring step is carried out prior to said confining step.

12. (original) The method of claim 7, wherein said monitoring step includes ascertaining at least one of (a) the position and (b) the characteristics of the at least one indicium.

13. (original) The method of claim 7, further comprising the steps of decoding the applied information and comparing the decoded information with the information obtained as a result of said monitoring step.

14. (original) The method of claim 13, wherein said monitoring step includes ascertaining the position of the at least one indicium.

15. (original) The method of claim 13, wherein said monitoring step includes generating a plurality of first signals and further comprising the step of generating a second signal denoting the sum of said first signals, said encoding step including encoding said second signal.

16. (original) The method of claim 7, wherein said associating step includes associating the at least one commodity with an indicium which is detectable through the container by at least one of acoustic, electrical, magnetic, electromagnetic, high-frequency, microwave and X-ray detectors.

17. (original) The method of claim 7, wherein said associating step includes providing the at least one commodity with at least one internal identifying indicium.

18. The method of claim 7, wherein said associating step includes providing the at least one commodity with at least one external identifying indicium.

19. The method of claim 7, wherein the at least one commodity exhibits at least one criterion and said associating step includes depriving the at least one commodity of said at least one criterion

Claims 20-27 (canceled).